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TEACHING DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN THROUGH LITERATURE

by

Melinda Meek Ranney

A thesis submitted to the
Division of Curriculum and Instruction
as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Abstract

This paper concentrated on the teaching of economically disadvantaged children and the importance of reading aloud to these children. The traditional language program was found to be ineffective for disadvantaged first-grade children. A modified language plan was implemented in a classroom of disadvantaged first-grade students. This plan consisted of two units and involved the reading aloud of literature and language-related activities. Results indicated these students learned more effectively from units of study centered around literature.

Teaching Disadvantaged Children Through Literature

Chapter 1: Introduction

When children begin school, they usually come equipped with a variety of experiences which are used in all learning processes. These experiences are crucial to children's learning because they can either smooth the road to success in school or hinder that road.

Average children come well prepared for school. They have had many valuable experiences at home or abroad. Their parents spend quality time with them. Books are read daily by family members and are read to younger children. Field trips are taken--such as trips to the zoo, beach, library, museum, grocery store--and meals are taken for granted. An average child's life is filled with a vast number of positive experiences by the time school begins.

Suppose, for a moment, a child enters school without all of these experiences. This child has grown up in an atmosphere where parents may or may not be able to read; trips to stores or libraries or the beach are rarely taken; homes are a single room where all family members eat, sleep, and bathe; hot meals are cherished; and electricity is not a necessity. This type of child enters school with an extremely different background and lacks the experiences the average child has upon which school learning may depend.

The socioeconomic status of a family should have no bearing on a child's education, but, unfortunately, it greatly affects a child's

education. The low socioeconomic child is disadvantaged from before school begins because of the lack of those experiences which are vital to learning and especially vital to reading.

There is a tremendous amount of background knowledge which is needed in the reading process. All authors assume their readers possess a certain amount of knowledge. When writing a story, book, or article, authors assume their readers are already familiar with certain material. Based on these assumptions, they write their stories. The readers of these stories should be able to read and understand the written word and what is not written but must be implied or assumed. Readers rely on some of their previous knowledge to help process the information being read. If the reader does not possess the previous knowledge needed to read and understand the written material, the reader is at a disadvantage. Thus, those children who have been deprived of certain early experiences begin reading already at a disadvantaged level.

Economically disadvantaged children have a right to a good education. Since they begin school with limited experiences in many areas compared to average children, something needs to be done to supply these children with as many experiences as necessary to help them in all areas of school. Teachers cannot do much to change a child's home situation and prior experiences, but teachers should be able to provide their students with experiences which will broaden

their learning. Teachers can open up new avenues of learning for their economically disadvantaged students by providing them with experiences which many children might take for granted.

Teachers of economically disadvantaged students cannot build upon the limited knowledge and experiences of economically disadvantaged students. Teachers of the economically disadvantaged have to spend more time building background knowledge covering topics which it is often assumed students already know. Economically disadvantaged students need the background knowledge and experiences; their teachers need the ideas and materials to provide what these students need.

The purpose of this project was to develop a curriculum which can provide economically disadvantaged students with the many experiences they need to enrich their lives within the school and elsewhere. Since reading is an essential part of learning and success, it was decided that teachers should broaden economically disadvantaged students' experiences through literature. This curriculum focused on reading literature aloud to first grade students and providing them with follow-up activities related to the literature. It was hypothesized that this would extend the background knowledge of students and provide them with valuable experiences needed to begin their school lives with success. They would, therefore, start their education with an advantage rather than at a disadvantage because of their parents' economic status.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

There is growing concern over the number of students dropping out of school before they receive an education which would enable them to succeed in society. Florida currently reports a 41% dropout rate which is the largest in the nation (Yaeger, 1989). Many of those it does graduate are unable to read at even the sixth-grade level (Yaeger, 1989). Many students drop out of school because they have had very little success in school and have been failing for several years; they see no reason for continuing their education in a system where "success" does not exist for them. Most of these students are economically disadvantaged (Edelman, 1987/1988; Shields, Gordon, & Dupree, 1983).

Economically disadvantaged children are children of low socioeconomic families who either live on or below the poverty level (Edelman, 1987/1988). Their basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter, are their primary concern and are not always met. These children suffer from inadequate nutrition, inadequate health care, poor language development, weak basic academic skills, and lack of stable home environments (Edelman, 1987/1988; Garton, 1984). According to Wyche and Wyche (1984), "disadvantage may be defined in terms of lack of exposure to events which non-disadvantaged individuals have" (p. 119). Most of the disadvantaged children today are black (Edelman, 1987/1988; Murphy, 1986; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1988).

Parents' perceptions of education greatly affect their children's success in school. Parents of these children are most often poorly educated, have low paying jobs or are unemployed, and do not provide the type of stimulating home life for their children's academic development; some of these parents cannot read (Murphy, 1986; Ortiz, 1986). Parents who cannot read have difficulty assisting their children with any type of school-related activity. Giving homework assistance, reading school notices, and reading everyday within the home are rare activities (France & Meeks, 1987). Parents who cannot read are unable to model reading behavior for their children. Further, they blame their failure to learn to read on schools. These parents view schools in negative ways due to their own educational experiences. Negative experiences in school leave individuals with low self-concepts, low aspirations for the future, and negative thoughts about education (Brantlinger, 1985). According to Brantlinger (1985), low-income parents want their children to receive the basic skills--reading, writing, and arithmetic--so they will be able to get a job and support themselves; college aspirations are seldom discussed or mentioned.

The socioeconomic level of a family should have no effect on a child's education, but it does have a tremendous impact on a child's success or failure in school (Edelman, 1987/1988; Murphy, 1986; Ortiz, 1986; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1988; Shields, Gordon, & Dupree, 1983;

Slaughter & Epps, 1987). Economically disadvantaged children are more likely to have delayed language skills development, read at lower levels, have weaker academic skills, score lower on achievement tests, and fail in school, than nondisadvantaged children (Edelman, 1987/1988; Ortiz, 1986; Wyche & Wyche, 1984). According to Carbo (1987), "only 18.8% of 'disadvantaged' youngsters in the U.S. ever reach an 'adept' level of reading proficiency" (p. 201). Race can also affect success or failure in school. In general, black children perform lower than white children on achievement tests, in school, and most especially, in reading (Torrey, 1983; Troutman & Falk, 1982). Low-income black youth are more likely to drop out of school and many do not believe that education is a way of succeeding in society (Ortiz, 1986; Slaughter & Epps, 1987).

Besides the socioeconomic status of a family, home environment also has an impact on learning. Language plays a significant role in the development of reading and the ability to succeed in all school-related areas. Most children acquire initial language skills before entering school, but many do not. The amount of time parents spend talking with their children is related to reading achievement (Greaney, 1986). According to Troutman and Falk (1982), "poor black children are deficient in language and lack favorable conditions such as verbal stimulation and development of cognitive skills" (p. 124). In many poor family environments, parents rarely involve their children in

conversations, and children aged three to five are ignored (Slaughter & Epps, 1987). When these children do speak, they do not usually receive any corrective feedback regarding their grammar, enunciation, and pronunciation (Slaughter & Epps, 1987; Wyche & Wyche, 1984).

A child with a poor language background will have difficulty when learning how to read. "Development of good reading skills requires language mastery and deprivation of adequate language stimulation in early life results in slower reading progress" (Lipson, 1986, p. 594). In order for economically disadvantaged children to learn to read successfully, they must overcome their language deficit (Troutman & Falk, 1982). Since these children are weaker in language skills than middle-class children upon entering school, the economically disadvantaged children begin their education already behind their peers in language development, oral language usage, and pre-reading skills.

Children entering school bring with them a body of knowledge and experiences. This background knowledge is essential in the reading process. It includes a whole range of experiences with which readers are familiar. "Reading is an interaction between the reader's background knowledge and the text; efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the material to one's own background" (Nelson, 1987, p. 425). Authors assume their readers know certain topics or subjects when they are writing their stories. If children have never before experienced a certain topic or area, they will have difficulty

understanding while reading passages written about that topic or area. Low socioeconomic children have not been exposed to the variety of experiences they need in order to have the background knowledge required for most children's texts. According to Maria (1989), "the distance between what disadvantaged children know and what they need to know to understand some texts is great" (p. 298). Maria further notes that children of low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have less background knowledge than middle-class children. "Disadvantaged children miss central implications and associations because they don't possess the background knowledge necessary to put the text in context" (Hirsch, 1987, p. 27).

Schema (or its plural schemata) is the name given to the variety of experiences individuals possess within their own mind (Andersson & Barnitz, 1984; Hirsch, 1987; Nelson, 1987). It is through the use of one's schemata that associations are made, knowledge is stored, and knowledge is organized in a way which is easily retrievable (Hirsch, 1987). When readers enter into the reading process, they assimilate what they read through their existing schemata. If there are existing related schemata, readers are able to apply their previous knowledge and experiences to what is being read. If there are no existing related schemata, readers cannot rely on what they already know in order to understand what they are reading. According to Hirsch (1987), "without appropriate background knowledge, people cannot adequately

understand written or spoken language" (p. 56). Economically disadvantaged students are more prone to lack the background knowledge or schemata needed to understand texts.

Disadvantaged students learn to read from the whole to the part which is a holistic approach to learning (Garton, 1984). Boykin (1984) believes that reading should be taught in a holistic approach. Young children who have taught themselves to read before entering school did so by reading an entire sentence, page, or book. They did not break down words but rather maintained the holistic structure (Fountas & Hannigan, 1989). Primary school children learn best in global reading styles and holistic methods (Carbo, 1987).

The whole language approach is one way of introducing children to reading and language through a holistic and natural manner (Ferguson, 1988; Gunderson & Shapiro, 1988). In a whole language approach, children are taught to read by reading books, poems, songs, and stories; they are constantly engaged in activities which are language-centered; and they learn to write by writing their own pieces of work (Ferguson, 1988; Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Slaughter, 1988).

The idea behind the whole language program is that children should learn to read and write in the same manner in which they learned to speak (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987; Fielos & Hillstead, 1986; Fountas & Hannigan, 1989). When learning to speak, children begin slowly by speaking a word or two and gradually begin expanding their

spoken language into whole sentences. Throughout this learning time, parents encourage their children to talk and help their children by making gentle corrections. Parents become enthusiastic when their children begin to talk and try to encourage them whenever possible. The whole language classroom provides children with the same type of supportive atmosphere. Language is learned by the exposure to language as a whole; it is learned by using it. According to Fountas and Hannigan (1989), "the basis of the whole language theory is that learning should go from the whole to the part, just as spoken language is learned" (p. 134). Reading and writing should be learned in the same way--from the whole to the part.

In a whole language classroom, children are surrounded by a print-rich environment (Altwerger, et al., 1987; Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; White, Vaughan, & Rorie, 1986). Rooms are filled with stories written by children, magazines and newspapers, children's literature, poems and songs written on chart paper, science and social studies projects, big books, announcements, directions, and environmental print (Altwerger, et al., 1987; Fountas & Hannigan, 1989). Environmental print includes materials which children see within their own homes--cereal boxes, soap wrappers, soup labels, candy wrappers, potato chip bags, and anything else which children can read from their homes (Aldridge & Rust, 1987; White, et al., 1986). Everywhere one looks, there is writing. This type of environment stimulates children's learning and thinking.

One of the primary aspects of a whole language program is literature (Altwerger et al., 1987; Carbo, 1987; Ferguson, 1988; Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Holdaway, 1989). Literature comes in a variety of forms--poems, songs, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, fiction and nonfiction, picture books, big books, and newspaper and magazine articles (Cianciolo, 1987; Ferguson, 1988; Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Trelease, 1979). By using literature in the classroom, children are exposed to a variety of literary forms, rich language, and complex sentence structures (Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Heald-Taylor, 1987a; Lehman & Crook, 1988). According to Trelease (1979), good literature "offers a wealth of language for children to use; it is precise, intelligent, colorful, sensitive, and rich in meaning" (p. 28).

Children can best be exposed to literature through the reading aloud process. Reading aloud increases reading comprehension, listening skills, language development, and spoken and written language (Smith, 1989; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Throne, 1988; Trelease, 1979). It is through the reading aloud of literature that children are taught the enjoyment and pleasure of books (Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Richardson, 1988; Roney, 1984; Smith, 1989; Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Children who are read to on a regular basis realize that print has meaning and are able to understand that books are read from front-to-back, left-to-right, and top-to-bottom (Carver, 1986; Richardson, 1988; Throne, 1988). Understanding book language and format helps readers

during their own reading process (Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Throne, 1988).

Reading aloud good literature expands children's minds. According to Roney (1984), "reading aloud is the only technique with potential for developing all types of background experience at once" (p. 199). Children are able to build upon their prior knowledge and add to their store of knowledge through the enjoyment of hearing books read (Brand, 1989; Cianciolo, 1987; Hiebert, 1988; Markham, 1984; Roney, 1984; Strickland & Morrow, 1989). The reading aloud of literature introduces children to a wide variety of language and vocabulary (Elley, 1989; Smith, 1989; Trelease, 1979). They are able to increase their vocabulary and integrate it into their own language patterns (Cianciolo, 1987; Smith, 1989). Children who are weak in language skills greatly benefit from the reading aloud process (Smith, 1989).

Reading aloud to children greatly enhances their desire to read as well as their ability to read (Elley, 1989; Heald-Taylor, 1987a; Hiebert, 1988; Smith, 1989; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Throne, 1988). Books teachers read aloud are chosen more often than those books not read aloud (Teale & Martinez, 1988). Teale and Martinez (1988) further note that books which teachers repeatedly read aloud are chosen over books read aloud only once. "Repeated readings permit exploration of a variety of features of the book" (Teale & Martinez, 1988, p. 12). Children who hear stories

or books read aloud want to be able to read those stories or books themselves (Heald-Taylor, 1987a; Smith, 1989; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Teale & Martinez, 1988). Their desire to read is enhanced by seeing and hearing a story read by an adult because adults who read aloud to children are significant role models (Greaney, 1986; Hiebert, 1988; Richardson, 1988; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Throne, 1988).

Creating the desire to read is an important task, one which must be achieved in order for children to want to read by themselves (Hiebert, 1988; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Trelease, 1979). Parents and teachers need to instill the desire to read within their children by modeling the reading process themselves (Greaney, 1986; Richardson, 1988; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Trelease, 1979).

Besides enhancing the desire to read, reading aloud also enhances the ability to read. By being exposed to rich vocabulary and language patterns, children use that new information in their own reading (Elley, 1989; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Trelease, 1979). They apply what they have heard read aloud to their own lives and reading experiences. Once an interest in books and reading has been ignited, children feel more confident when reading by themselves (Heald-Taylor, 1987a; Trelease, 1979). The desire to read and the ability to read are closely related: If the desire or motivation is there, the ability to read is increased (Richardson, 1988; Throne, 1988; Trelease, 1979).

Not all books are suitable for reading aloud. Books which have

controlled vocabulary such as preprimers and beginning-to-read books are not quality literature (Cianciolo, 1987; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Throne, 1988). The purpose of reading aloud is to stimulate interest and excitement within children; controlled vocabulary books do not always provide the thrills, beautiful language, or story plots which grab the listener's attention (Cianciolo, 1987; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Throne, 1988; Trelease, 1979).

Big books and predictable books or stories are good examples of read aloud stories (Cassady, 1988; Heald-Taylor, 1987a; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Throne, 1988). Big books are much like regular books except that the print and pictures have been enlarged (Cassady, 1988; Ferguson, 1988; Tovey, Johnson, & Szocrer, 1988). Big books enable the children to become involved in the story because they are able to see both the words and pictures throughout the reading process (Cassady, 1988; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Tovey et al., 1988). According to Cassady (1988), reading aloud big books "improves recall of story elements, increases enthusiasm and interest, provides for a marked difference in children's attentiveness and interaction with the teacher, and increases their interest in the print and its relationship to the language and meaning of the story" (p. 19).

Predictable books or stories contain repeated phrases, rhymes, plots, patterns, or sequence (Heald-Taylor, 1987a, 1987b; Teale & Martinez, 1988). "When read aloud by the teacher, they allow students

to predict what word comes next and to soon recognize the written form of the repeated word because it makes sense" (Cassady, 1988, p. 21). Children learn the story through the repeated readings of it.

Besides big books and predictable books, there is a variety of other good quality literature for read-aloud time. Fairy tales, poems, and Mother Goose rhymes are excellent choices for read-aloud time (Trelease, 1979). Teachers and parents can find a list of read-aloud books and stories in recent publications found in libraries (Cianciolo, 1987; Heald-Taylor, 1987b; O'Brien & Stoner, 1987; Trachtenburg & Ferruggia, 1989; Trelease, 1979).

It is important for parents and teachers to have follow-up activities or discussions after reading aloud stories to children (Carver, 1986; Cassady, 1988; Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Heald-Taylor, 1987a; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Throne, 1988). These will enable the children to relate what they have heard to their own lives and experiences and to broaden their knowledge (Carver, 1986; Cassady, 1988; Fountas & Hannigan, 1989). Any experiences which can further broaden children's knowledge about a subject should be explored. Providing children with follow-up activities related to a book or story read aloud will help extend their learning.

Children who are read to on a daily basis have many advantages. Language skills are improved, vocabulary is broadened, background knowledge is increased, comprehension in listening and reading is

expanded, and ability and desire to read are increased (Brand, 1989; Cianciolo, 1987; Heald-Taylor, 1987a; Hiebert, 1988; Roney, 1984; Smith, 1989; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Throne, 1988). All children should have the pleasure of hearing our language spoken in its truest form; all children should have the opportunity to let their imaginations expand.

The importance of literature in classrooms cannot be overlooked. By incorporating literature into classrooms, all students would have the opportunity to broaden their background knowledge, increase their ability and desire to read, and learn in a more holistic manner (Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Hiebert, 1988; Markham, 1984; Roney, 1984; Smith, 1989; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Throne, 1988).

The benefits of reading aloud literature to disadvantaged students involve most of the areas in which they have difficulty--language skills, background experiences, desire or motivation to learn, and increased reading performance (Boykin, 1984; Lipson, 1986; Troutman & Falk, 1982). By reading aloud to disadvantaged children, teachers can begin to close the extensive gap between what their students know and what they need to know in order to be successful in school and in society.

Chapter 3: Procedures

The need for this curriculum was determined by referring to the review of the related literature and using the professional experience of teaching in a low-income school.

The goals or objectives were written specifically for a first-grade class of economically disadvantaged children.

This curriculum was organized into units of study based on fairy tales because of their importance as a part of every child's literary heritage. Two fairy tales were chosen as the units of study--The Three Billy Goats Gruff and Jack and the Beanstalk. These two fairy tales were chosen because of the many adventures in them, and because the children had not watched either of them in a theater or on television. Both of these fairy tales had a "monster" type of character which children tend to enjoy.

The unit activities were chosen primarily for economically disadvantaged first-grade students. Professional experience and colleagues' suggestions were also determining factors in the selection of appropriate learning activities.

This curriculum was evaluated in two ways. A pilot implementation of the curriculum units was conducted in the researcher's classroom. Teacher observation of changes in students' academic behavior in the classroom was a major evaluation device. Colleagues who were asked to read the curriculum unit plans were also surveyed.

Chapter Four: Presentation of the DataA Need for Curriculum Change

It is not uncommon for most teachers to follow a structured curriculum plan in their classes. Teacher's editions are followed precisely day after day with teachers rarely straying from them. For many schools, this type of teaching may work well; for schools which teach predominantly disadvantaged students, this type of structured educational program is not as effective. The result of this study has indicated that a modified educational program was more effective than the traditional program.

If a plan is not working, changes need to be made. The traditional language program did not work well with the first-grade children in this study. The curriculum in the traditional program included teaching children the parts of speech as well as recognizing the difference between telling and asking sentences. The things missing in the traditional program were literature, poetry, and writing activities. Students were expected to learn various language parts, put all the parts together, and make sense out of the process.

The economically disadvantaged children in this study learned better from a whole-to-part approach. They needed to be exposed to rich language experiences which were taught in enjoyable ways. Since these students were deficient in language skills, they required a language program which used literature, spoken and written language,

and expanded listening comprehension activities which broadened their oral vocabulary and increased their ability to write.

The Changed Curriculum

In order to improve the language program, several changes had to occur: (a) the teacher had to be more flexible and receptive to a variety of teaching methods; (b) the teacher had to be willing to find some ideas or materials after school hours; and (c) the whole classroom atmosphere had to be more open.

Since changing a language curriculum was time consuming and a difficult task, it was necessary to begin gradually. It was determined that a good place to begin was through the reading aloud process. The traditional language textbook was put on the shelf and the children's literature books were brought out.

The language program needed to include more than listening activities involving the reading aloud of literature. Writing skills also needed to be included. Topics or units of study which were interesting to students were used to encourage the children to write. Fairy tales seemed to be appropriate themes for this modified language program. These units of study also led to a program which integrated not only spelling, reading, and language, but also social studies and science.

Beginning with The Three Billy Goats Gruff, the story was read aloud and discussed several times (see Appendix A). Children were

engaged in activities such as role-playing using the flannel board, musical instruments, and their bodies. They made their own interpretation of trolls out of clay, designed their own bridges, wrote and read stories about trolls, and made "Troll House Cookies". A poem about a troll was displayed which was read every day.

A poem introduced earlier during the unit on The Three Billy Goats Gruff mentioned both trolls and giants. A logical fairy tale to proceed to was Jack and the Beanstalk because of the giant. The story was read aloud and discussed; language which was unfamiliar was taught. The familiar "Fee-fi-fo-fum" phrase was displayed in the room, a listening center was set up, bean seeds were planted, and a language experience story was written. Children brainstormed ideas of ways to trap a giant and their ideas were displayed in the room. Chapters from The Giant's Farm by Jane Yolen were read aloud every day; "Giant No-Cook Bon-bons" were made at the conclusion of the book. Children worked in groups making their own life-size giants out of chart paper. Each group of children named their giant and found a place in the room to put their giant. Signs were made warning anyone entering the classroom that trolls and giants were alive in the room. Children had to write at least one sentence about their giants. All stories were made into a "giant book" for all to read (see Appendix B).

The changes which occurred in the classroom from the beginning to the end of this program were astounding. Students who never before

picked up a book were choosing books to read all during the day. Groups of children gathered together to read books to each other. Children began to write stories--during their own time--about themselves and other people. Students who earlier chose a game to play during free time were using their time reading and writing. They learned how to cooperate with each other and how to make decisions together. In October, the children had been very frustrated when trying to write anything. In March, after only two months with the modified language program, they were more comfortable about writing and were not afraid to try. The classroom was more active and the noise level was higher, but more learning was taking place and the students were enjoying it.

Teacher Feedback

Four teachers participated by reading the modified language plan and answering a short questionnaire (see Appendix C). All were interested in implementing the plan or plans at a later date.

The Three Billy Goats Gruff unit was implemented by two of the four teachers. One extended the unit over a two week period and did not follow the plan exactly. This teacher was frustrated over the writing activities. Her class was very enthusiastic during the unit, however, especially the role-playing activities. The other teacher followed the plan as it was written. She experienced frustration over the role-playing activities, yet felt the students enjoyed the

activities. The writing activities worked well with her class.

All teachers agreed that the units of study would be motivating to the students and interesting for teachers to teach. Some comments were made as to the length of the daily activities and what could be changed in order for the plans to work more effectively.

The two teachers who used the units agreed that the children had made greater improvements in reading, writing, listening, and cooperative learning than before the study when regular textbook learning was used.

Chapter Five: Discussion and ImplicationsA Need for Curriculum Change

The traditional language program was found to be ineffective for these economically disadvantaged first-grade students. A less structured curriculum which exposed children to quality literature and language related activities was a much more effective program idea than the traditional language program. Research showed that disadvantaged children learned best when taught in a holistic manner--learning from the whole-to-the-part (Carbo, 1987; Ferguson, 1988; Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Garton, 1984; Slaughter, 1988). These children needed to be taught in a manner more consistent with their learning styles.

The Changed Curriculum

The reading aloud of good literature was an appropriate starting place for this curriculum plan. Since many disadvantaged children were not read aloud to at home, the teacher was the only person the children saw or heard modeling the reading process. This had a tremendous impact on the children. The children were a captivated audience and yearned to hear more stories. Books which the teacher read aloud were literally fought over by the children during silent reading time. The children looked forward to story time and there was a visible difference in the children's attitude toward reading. The traditional language text never created that kind of desire and enthusiasm among children. The first step to the modified language plan was a success.

The most difficult task was deciding how to incorporate writing into the modified language plan without causing the students to become frustrated and anxious. Earlier in the year attempts had been made to teach the students to write their own stories. The students became greatly frustrated by their inability to spell and write words; they quickly lost interest and the desire to write. The children may have been introduced to writing too early or they may have needed more background knowledge about certain topics before writing about them.

The results of this research have shown that these students needed to be taught through units of study which enabled them to learn from the whole-to-the-part. In the unit approach, students were exposed to literature and language-related activities in an enjoyable manner. They absorbed new information, and added it to their background knowledge. They were then able to write about it.

Fairy tales were chosen as topics of the study because of their literary quality, their adventurous tales, and because many disadvantaged children were unfamiliar with the fairy tales. The two fairy tales chosen were The Three Billy Goats Gruff and Jack and the Beanstalk. Both of these tales contained a "monster" type of character and neither one had been seen on television or in the movie theater.

The Three Billy Goats Gruff unit caught the students' attention right away. The activities in which they were engaged were attempted enthusiastically. The noise level in the classroom was higher than

usual, but the children were actively participating in learning activities and enjoying themselves.

The students were just as intrigued by the Jack and the Beanstalk unit. Students began pursuing activities related to the units. Children role-played on their own and used stuffed animals as characters. Students who never before read on their own, chose to do so. Stories were written daily about trolls, giants, and adventures. The listening center with the story of Jack and the Beanstalk was always busy, filled with children sharing headsets in order to hear the story. The classroom was filled with active learning.

The children's earlier anxieties about writing were not evident. Once they had the background from which to get information, they were eager to write. They used the information they had learned and wrote about it. The children were able to write at least one complete sentence and could read what they had written. They were not able to do this earlier in the year.

Teaching units of fairy tales provided children with an exciting new approach to learning. They were able to begin with a whole story and gradually break it down to write and read on their own. Students looked forward to the activities and eagerly completed them. Their independent enjoyment of books and reading increased; they began writing their own stories; and their enthusiasm for learning was evident throughout the day.

Teacher Feedback

Teachers who completed the questionnaire made recommendations for possible unit changes. All of them were anxious to implement the plan, but many wanted to wait until the end of the year. This could be because the plan was very different than the current language program, and it would have been difficult to implement if the teachers were worried about completing the current language texts. By the end of the year, many teachers would have completed all their assigned texts and would be more willing to try out the modified language plan.

One teacher who did implement the plan chose which activities were to be implemented and when they would be implemented. When this class did the writing activity, they all became frustrated. This particular activity was not as successful with these students as the teacher had expected. It is probable that these students needed more practice with related activities before doing the writing activities. This teacher spent several extra days on the role-playing activities which the children greatly enjoyed. All children were given an opportunity to participate in all of the role-playing activities. This teacher grouped children at the front of the room while they were performing. Giving every child the chance to participate in role-playing activities and grouping them during the activities were two changes this teacher suggested to make the activities more effective.

The daily activities for each unit of study took longer than

expected. Some activities such as the making of the giants took twice as long as the plan specified. Teachers who read over the plan noted the length of the daily plans and suggested splitting the activities up into several days. It was decided the writing activities and the making of the giants could be extended to a week each if it were necessary.

Teacher preparation time was much more than a textbook lesson would require. Although quality literature took time and effort to locate, it was decided that the result was well worth the effort. An interesting finding from this study was the difficulty experienced when trying to locate good picture books of the individual fairy tales. Surprisingly, however, the children were captivated with a version of Jack and the Beanstalk which only had one picture. They paid more attention to what they heard and were able to use their imaginations more.

Future Plans

This modified language plan for economically disadvantaged first-grade children was effective, but two units of study would not be adequate for an entire language program. It would be necessary to develop several more units of study in order to continue this plan throughout the school year. Other fairy tale units could include: Little Red Riding Hood, The Ugly Duckling, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Hansel and Gretel, The Gingerbread Boy, and The Little Red Hen.

Many of these tales could be developed for use during special holidays or seasons of the year. The researcher decided to develop separate units for all these fairy tales in order to continue the desire to learn among economically disadvantaged first-grade children.

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Appendix A

The Three Billy Goats Gruff

Day 1

Objective. Upon hearing the story, the students will be able to name the proper characters of the story. Given clay, they will be able to create their own troll using clay.

Materials. The Three Billy Goats Gruff by Paul Galdone, clay

1. Define any terms which may be unfamiliar.
2. Read The Three Billy Goats Gruff aloud and discuss what happened in the story.
3. Have students draw pictures of the different characters in the story.
4. Assign students to make their own interpretations of a troll using clay. Display these in the room and label them with signs (optional).

Evaluation. The students draw pictures of the characters and tell who they are to the teacher. Each child will make one troll out of clay.

Day 2

Objective. After hearing the story, the students will demonstrate their knowledge of the story by participating in the flannel board activity.

Materials. Flannel board, felt cut-out characters of the story

1. Ask the children what story they heard yesterday. Review any language which was introduced.

2. Read the story aloud again.

3. Tell the story using the flannel board and felt cut-out characters. Encourage the children to join in with choral speaking.

4. Choose four students to be the characters of the story. Tell the story while the children participate using the flannel board. This should be done several times choosing different students each time.

Evaluation. The children use their given felt character appropriately.

Day 3

Objective. After being given a musical instrument appropriate for each character, the child will play the instrument at the appropriate time when the story is told.

Materials. Flannel board, felt cut-outs of the characters, musical instruments (triangles, cymbals, rhythm sticks, and drums), chart with "The Trap" poem (from Whole Language Sourcebook, Scholastic)

1. Reenact the story using the flannel board with children chosen as participants. All children are encouraged to join in when telling the story.

2. Assign specific instruments to the characters: Triangles represent the Little Billy Goat Gruff; rhythm sticks represent the Big Billy Goat Gruff; cymbals represent the Big Big Billy Goat Gruff; and

the drums represent the Troll. Pass the instruments out to the children. Children play their instruments whenever their character walks over the bridge when the story is told. The flannel board activity is going on at the same time.

3. Read "The Trap" poem from Scholastic: I'm building a trap for a troll, a horrible mangy old troll. I saw him today on my way through the lane, so I'm building a trap for a troll. I'm building a trap for a giant, a great, big, ugly, old giant. I saw him today on my way out to play, so I'm building a trap for a giant.

Evaluation. The child uses the instrument at the appropriate time when the story is told.

Day 4

Objective. The children will demonstrate their understanding of the story by taking part in at least one of three role-playing activities.

Materials. Flannel board, felt cut-out characters, musical instruments, a table or desk, pillows, 6 ounce jar of peanut butter, 6 ounces of chocolate chips, 5 cups of crispy cereal, a bowl, a spoon, waxed paper, a plate, and A Troll, a Truck, and a Cookie by Phylliss Adams, Eleanore Hartson, and Mark Taylor, and chart paper

1. Hand out instruments to the children. Assign students as flannel board characters. Tell parts of the story as students act out their parts.

2. Assign students to role-play the story. Use a table or desk as a bridge. As students act out the story, all role-playing activities are taking place. Do this several times.

3. Read A Troll, a Truck, and a Cookie. Make "Troll House Cookies as found in the above story. Melt the peanut butter and chocolate chips. Stir until mixed. Add the cereal. Stir. Drop by teaspoons on waxed paper. Refrigerate. Copy this recipe on a chart and display so children can copy it if they want to at a later time.

4. Read "The Trap" together.

Evaluation. The teacher evaluates children by their ability to perceive their roles in the proper context on the story.

Day 5

Objective. Divided into groups of three, the students will make their own bridge using their bodies. The students will demonstrate their ability to remember the story by drawing their favorite part of the story, writing at least one sentence to go with the picture, and reading that sentence to the teacher.

Materials. Troll cookies made from the day before, drawing paper, wall paper books

1. Divide children into groups of three and have them make bridges using their bodies.

2. Give students paper and have them design their own bridges using crayons. Display these in the room.

3. Make a fairy tale book using wallpaper samples as covers.

Have students draw their favorite part of the story and write at least one sentence about the picture. They must read what they have written to the teacher.

4. Eat the cookies.

Evaluation. Each group of children must make a bridge using their bodies. Students read their sentences to the teacher and tell about their pictures.

References

The Three Billy Goats Gruff by Paul Galdone, Clarion.

Whole Language Sourcebook by Jane Baskwill and Paulette Whitman, Scholastic.

A Troll, a Truck, and a Cookie by Phylliss Adams, Eleanore Hartson, and Mark Taylor, Follett Publishing Company.

Related Books

There's a Nightmare in my Closet by Mercer Meyer, Dial.

Harry and the Terrible Whatzit by Dick Gackenbach, Scholastic.

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak, Scholastic.

The Troll Family Stories by Follett Double Scoop Books.

There are Trolls by J. F. Green, Scholastic.

Other Activities

1. Listening to the story in the listening center.
2. Providing a copy of the story which the children can read.

3. Providing a troll cut-out for children to complete and write a story to go with it.
4. Making signs to go up around the room about trolls.

Appendix B

Jack and the Beanstalk

Day 1

Objective. After hearing the story, the students will answer questions about the story.

Materials. Jack and the Beanstalk story, seeds, chart paper, "The Trap" poem

1. Introduce the story or book. Have students predict what it will be about.
2. Read the story. Discuss any words or phrases throughout the story which might be unfamiliar to the students.
3. Sit in a circle. Pass a ball around the circle taking turns telling part of the story when the ball reaches each person.
4. Write out the repetitive phrase "Fee-fi-fo-fum" on chart paper. Practice reading it with the students using various voice styles.
5. Show different types of seeds Jack could have planted.
6. Read "The Trap" (from Whole Language Sourcebook, Scholastic).

Evaluation. Students tell part of the story when they receive a ball passed to them in random order.

Day 2

Objective. After planting seeds, students will be able to tell what is needed to plant seeds.

Materials. Seeds, plastic cups, soil, Jack and the Beanstalk story, "Fee- fi-fo-fum" chart, paper

1. After discussing the story from yesterday, have each child plant two bean seeds. Emphasize why bean seeds are being planted and have them relate it to the story.

2. Read Jack and the Beanstalk again, pausing in areas where children can join in with choral speaking.

3. Read the "Fee-fi-fo-fum" chart together, pointing to the words as they are being read.

4. Have children draw what they planted including all the materials they used.

Evaluation. Children draw the materials used when they planted their seeds. They should include in their pictures the seeds, soil, water, and some sort of container.

Day 3

Objective. Using complete sentences, the students will be able to tell the proper sequence of planting seeds.

Materials. Chart paper, listening center of the story

1. Make a language experience story about planting the seeds. Have children hypothesize what will happen and why bean seeds were planted. Reread this several times together.

2. Provide a listening center with the Jack and the Beanstalk story.

3. Read "The Trap" poem.

4. Have the children retell in their own words how they planted their seeds. Option: Have them draw pictures showing the sequence.

Evaluation. Students tell how they planted their seeds when called on in random order. If pictures were drawn, the teacher can check the sequence of the pictures.

Day 4

Objective. After reading "The Trap" together, the students will give at least one suggestion of a way to trap a giant.

Materials. Tagboard, The Giant's Farm by Jane Yolen

1. Read the language experience story together.
2. Observe and discuss any changes with the plants.
3. Read "The Trap" poem together.
4. Have children think of ways to trap a giant. List these on tagboard, cut them up, and display them in the room.
5. Read chapter one of The Giant's Farm.
6. Prepare the children for tomorrow's activities by having them think of how they would create their own giants.
7. Read "Fee-fi-fo-fum" together.

Evaluation. The students tell one way they would trap a giant which the teacher writes and displays in the room. Each child must have at least one idea.

Day 5

Objective. Divided into small groups, the students will work cooperatively and will make their own giants out of paper.

Materials. Big paper, The Giant's Farm

1. Read the different trap ideas together and add new ideas to the list.

2. Read chapter two of The Giant's Farm.

3. Divide students into groups to make their own giants.

Children may choose with whom they would like to work, but no more than four children should be in one group.

4. Observe the plants and note any changes.

Evaluation. Teacher observation will be used to determine how each group works together. Giants will probably not be completed yet, so the teacher should observe the progress of each group and their giants.

Day 6

Objective. Using teacher observation, the students will work cooperatively in their small groups to make their own giants.

Materials. Big paper, The Giant's Farm

1. Read chapter 3 of The Giant's Farm.

2. Continue making the giants.

3. Observe the plants and note any changes.

Evaluation. The teacher observes the students working together.

Day 7

Objective. Working cooperatively in small groups, the students will complete their giants and decide what name to give their giants.

Materials. Big paper, The Giant's Farm, construction paper, markers

1. Read chapter four of The Giant's Farm.
2. Have the students divide up into their groups and finish their giants.
3. Each group must decide on a name for their giant and decide where to put their giant in the classroom.
4. Students who finish before the others may make signs to go around the room concerning giants.
5. Observe the plants and note any changes.

Evaluation. Each group decides on a name for their giant which was decided cooperatively among each group.

Day 8

Objective. After completing their giants, the students will write at least one sentence about their giant and be able to read what they have written to the teacher.

Materials. Paper, butter, powdered sugar, vanilla, bowl, waxed paper, a tray, The Giant's Farm, chart paper with the recipe

1. Have the students write at least one sentence about their giants. After they have finished their sentences, they must read them to the teacher and/or to the class.

2. Make "Giant No-cook Bon-bons" as found in The Giant's Farm.
3. Read chapter five of The Giant's Farm.
4. Collect all completed stories and copy them over on newsprint for the children to illustrate tomorrow.

Evaluation. Each student reads his or her sentence to the teacher which the student has written.

Day 9

Objective. After reading their completed stories, students will illustrate their stories.

Materials. Bon-bons, the recipe, paper, The Foolish Giant by Bruce and Katherine Coville, completed stories written on newsprint

1. Pass out each child's completed stories on newsprint for him or her to illustrate. Have them read their copied version.

2. Children who have not completed stories need to finish. Collect these and copy them for children to illustrate whenever time permits.

3. Turn in all illustrated stories to be laminated to make a big book for the class.

4. Read The Foolish Giant to the class.

5. Eat the bon-bons.

Evaluation. Each student illustrates his or her completed story.

Day 10

Objective. After hearing Jim and the Beanstalk read aloud, the

students will compare the story with Jack and the Beanstalk by drawing two pictures--one from each story.

Materials. Jim and the Beanstalk by Raymond Briggs, all stories written by the children

1. Read Jim and the Beanstalk. Have the children discuss ways it is like Jack and the Beanstalk and ways the two stories are different.

2. Pass out paper and have children draw two pictures of how the stories are different by drawing one picture from Jack and the Beanstalk and one picture from Jim and the Beanstalk.

3. Display the laminated book in the room for the children to read.

Evaluation. Each child will have two pictures, one from Jack and the Beanstalk and one from Jim and the Beanstalk which show how the stories are different.

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Whole Language Sourcebook by Jane Baskwill and Paulette Whitman, Scholastic.

The Giant's Farm by Jane Yolen, Clarion.

The Foolish Giant by Bruce and Katherine Coville, Lippincott.

Jim and the Beanstalk by Raymond Briggs, Penguin.

you did it, and how it worked.

Appendix C

Questionnaire

	<u>Always</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Never</u>
1. This curriculum would be of interest to me for my grade level.	_____	_____	_____
2. I followed the plan exactly.	_____	_____	_____
3. The students were enthusiastic while learning.	_____	_____	_____
4. During free time or spare time, students did activities related to the theme or unit.	_____	_____	_____
5. The plan was easy to follow.	_____	_____	_____
6. I would use this plan again.	_____	_____	_____

What suggestions can you make in order for this plan to be the most effective?

If you altered the plan in any way, please indicate what you did, why you did it, and how it worked.

Further Comments:

Vita

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